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ABSTRACT

This study compared the impact of an international educational program with that of a multicultural educational kindergarten program. A convenience sample of 13 children participated in a university-based full day international education kindergarten program. Sixteen children from a medium-size seacoast center participated in a multicultural educational kindergarten program. The project-developed picture-based Inventory of Cultural Information and Attitudes was used to measure culturally accurate information, culturally sensitive information, overgeneralized information, culturally insensitive information, and ethnocentric responses. Parents completed a questionnaire regarding cultural influences present in the child's environment, the extent of the child's travel, and if there were international influences in the child's heritage. Results indicated that there was no significant difference on overall culturally accurate information by site or by sex. However, children gave more culturally accurate information for cultures they had studied. Children in the international program used phrases that were more culturally sensitive than children in the multicultural program. All the children overgeneralized information, with international program children overgeneralizing slightly more often. Very few culturally insensitive remarks were made by either group. Boys were more likely to respond in ethnocentric ways than girls. Parent questionnaire scores correlated with children's overall culturally accurate score and their sensitivity score. (Contains 46 references.) (KDFB)

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CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND ATTITUDES ABOUT PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

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I have been teaching at the University of New Hampshire Child Study and Development Center (CSDC) since the school was built in 1988. We educate children 6 weeks to 6 years old in full and part day programs. Each of the seven classrooms reflects a different culture. Initially, I taught 4-5 year old children about Japan for five years. Three years ago a full-day kindergarten program, which focuses on the culture of Kenya, was added. When I began thinking about writing a thesis over six years ago, I realized that I needed to find out for myself whether there was any effect to the challenging curriculum that I had developed. This curriculum was challenging to children, but also to me as a teacher, in that it continually required me to learn more and more about Japan. It hasn't been as important that children remember specific cultural information, but rather that studying one culture has created a soft spot in their hearts for a country very far away. For instance, parents have shared stories over the years about the role that Japan has played in future educational situations. How these children have shocked the waiters at Sakura (a

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Japanese restaurant in Portsmouth, NH) with their appropriate responses and respect for cultural practices. Children's ears perk up when they hear Japan mentioned on the news. But regardless of these wonderful stories, I needed to get more formal data to back up my hunches.

When I moved onto the Kenya classroom, many children from the Japan room moved into our kindergarten. I realized that we needed to learn about Kenya together since I knew nothing about this African country. What we learned as a collaborative group led me to the work of L. S. Vygotsky and his theory of social constructivism. One aspect of this theory highlights the quality of the learning that occurs within the group. Barbara Rogoff (1990) summarized it perfectly when she wrote, "Central to Vygotsky's theory is the idea that children's participation in cultural activities with the guidance of more skilled partners allows children to internalize the tools for thinking and for taking more mature approaches to problem solving that children have practiced in social context. (p.14)" As it applies to my work, I take this to mean that the learning that transpires between children and teachers within the group is internalized and therefore helps to create foundations upon which later learning for each participant is based. I needed no hard data to determine that the group as a whole had learned a wealth of information over the course of the year. What I wanted to find out was if that information *was* internalized individually and if it affected their attitudes about people from other countries.

DEFINITIONS AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are a number of different approaches to integrating culture into a classroom environment. A review of the literature and definition of terms is necessary to highlight these approaches and establish a common foundation of understanding from which to move forward.

Multicultural Education is an underlying theme to many good programs for young children within the United States. Patty Ramsey has written quite a bit on the subject. In her book, *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World, Multicultural Education for Young Children* (1987), she defines multicultural education as a perspective that "a) encompasses many dimensions of human difference besides culture such as race, occupation, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, and various physical traits and needs, b) is relevant to all children, even those who live in homogeneous areas, and c) extends beyond the boundaries of this country to beliefs and attitudes about people all over the world. (p.2-4)"

This perspective, translated into classroom practice means that if one has a variety of cultures or abilities within the group, time is usually spent learning about and cultivating an understanding for those unique features. Careful attention is paid to the types of literature that is available to children, activities that are provided and cultivating a willingness among children to cooperate. If there is little diversity within the group, multicultural education has tended to mean exposing children to many different cultural practices within the school year.

Whatever way it is accomplished, the overall goal has been to expose children

to difference at an early age so that they can begin to appreciate and value those differences rather than dismiss them.

Anti-Bias Curriculum is a handbook written by Louise Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989). The intention is not for teachers to set aside a special time of day to integrate this curriculum, but for it to be used pervasively throughout the day, throughout the year. The basic goal is to help children develop positive self-concepts without acquiring attitudes of superiority and ethnocentrism. They write, "It is value based: Differences are good; oppressive ideas and behaviors are not. It sets up a creative tension between respecting difference and not accepting unfair beliefs and acts. (p. x)"

Derman-Sparks and Ramsey have collaborated on many project and articles. The Anti-Bias Curriculum is seen as a corollary to the Multicultural approach and is helpful for teachers to confront their own racial attitudes while also getting ideas about how to empower children that had been previously stereotyped.

Global Education is an approach to culture in the classroom used with middle and high school students. The goal of this approach is to help children recognize the interconnectedness of the world through a study of the problems and issues that cut across national boundaries. It involves perspective taking and the realization that while there are differences among people, there are also common threads that connect us all.

International Education has been highlighted by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. It proposes a socio-affective approach to teaching international perspectives to children. At CSDC, we expose children to one culture for at least a year, attempting to go beyond a tourist curriculum. It is our attempt to move beyond holidays and teach children, depending on their developmental stage about clothing, food, music, shelter, cultural celebrations, city as well as country life, and the different dynamics within the family. It is through this sustained experience that we feel children can move beyond a superficial knowledge of the country to a more in-depth understanding of the people who live there.

I like to use a simple analogy to describe the difference between multicultural and international education. It is as if you go to a party and you chat briefly with 7 or 8 people. The next morning, it might be difficult to remember which story you heard from which person. If you had chosen to meet one new person during that party and spent your whole evening getting to know him/her, you would have a better understanding and appreciation of who that person was as an individual.

HYPOTHESES

1. Children participating in an international educational program are more likely to provide more culturally accurate information about those countries to which they have been exposed for extended periods than children from the multicultural program.

2. Children from the international program will be less likely to overgeneralize cultural information than the children in the multicultural program.

3. Children from the international educational program will provide fewer ethnocentric responses than children in the multicultural program.

4. Children from the international program are more likely to have a greater awareness of different countries around the world.

SUBJECTS

The population examined were kindergartners living in a relatively homogeneous, northern New England environment. The sample was one of convenience. Thirteen children (seven girls and six boys), five to six years of age, from a university-based full day kindergarten program represented the international perspectives population. Sixteen children with 7 boys and 9 girls, five to six years of age, from a medium-size seacoast center represented the multicultural education population.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument: I developed the Inventory of Cultural Information and Attitudes. Five pictures were shown to children after introductory questions were completed. The

pictures were of children from Japan, Australia, Kenya, China and Spain. These countries were chosen because they were studied in either of the two programs involved with this study. Therefore, no child had studied about all five of these countries and all had studied at least one. This provided the opportunity to investigate information each child had learned from direct instruction and to see if that information could be generalized to other countries that children might have little information about.

Children were given the opportunity to list all the counties they could think of and provide information about any country that they would not be asked about later in the interview. Children were asked open ended questions referring to the countries they had mentioned.

Five pictures were then shown one at a time and questions were asked in regard to that specific country and child in the picture. Questions about Japan and Australia used a detailed questioning technique while the other three countries had open-ended questions. There were a number of reasons for the difference in questioning techniques. First, detailed questions regarding many different countries would have been too lengthy and tiring for young children. Secondly, while it was important not to lead children in their responses, it proved helpful in accessing more in-depth information for most children. Third, integrating approaches gave an opportunity for individualization.

A one page questionnaire was distributed to parents of children who had participated in the study. These questions related to the cultural influences already

present in the child's environment. Of interest was what the parent's perception of the child's program was and if they felt the cultural influence was important, if the parents had travelled, if the child had travelled and whether there was international influences in the child's heritage.

CODING

I used FIVE over-arching categories in which to organize and code information. I would like to give a brief description of each dependent variable.

Culturally accurate information was any accurate fact about a country. For instance, "They eat different food in China and eat with chopsticks. They have darker faces and most have black hair." Another child said,"It is hot in Africa. Some people wear red clothing to scare away the lions."

Culturally sensitive information does not assume that all people do things in the same way. Rather, the child did not have enough information on their own to answer a question accurately, but was answered in such a way that was respectful of the difference. For instance, "They speak another language," or "I want to know what their ways are." These children acknowledged that the culture is unfamiliar, but knew enough about what "culture" meant in other countries and was sensitive to those possible differences in an open and receptive manner.

Overgeneralized information was cultural detail that cannot usually be generalized to the majority of the country. One child said, "All Kenyans are shepherds." While it is true that some Kenyans are shepherds, to say that all

Kenyans are shepherds was an overgeneralization.

Culturally insensitive information gave little opportunity for other cultural practices or the child responded in a way that communicated a negative opinion about the culture or the people within it...like "They have a dirty school" or "The water looks polluted." These children were not imposing their cultural practice upon other people, but showed a lack of sensitivity towards others.

Ethnocentric responses were those that projected American culture or a child's own experience to another culture. Ethnocentric responses also showed an attitude of American superiority. "He plays Candyland" in Japan or "They have cowboys."

RESULTS

Children's Inventory: There was no significant difference between the mean scores on **overall culturally accurate information** by site or by sex. Children from both programs had quite a bit of culturally accurate information. It was obvious that there were children in both programs who had a lot of accurate information across the board and some children who didn't have much at all. This indicated that cultural information could either be of interest to children or not. Some children who had given quite a lot of information at the multicultural center told me that they had learned it from books or movies. Most children in both programs used picture cues as well.

My hypothesis was really that children would give more culturally accurate

information *about the culture they studied...* not an *overall* culturally accurate score. In fact, when I compared the culturally specific information for each child which was in reference to the country that s/he studied, there was a significant relationship.

There was a significant difference between mean **culturally sensitive** scores. The children in the international program used phrases that were more culturally sensitive than the multicultural program. For instance, one child when asked "If Hiromasa came to your classroom and he was really nice, what would you want to ask him about his country?" At the international setting, one girl's answer was "What do you like best about your country?" Another child responded, "Would you teach me some of your language?" Or "could I come visit you, I've never been to Japan." When asked what is the same about you and these Australian children another girl answered, "We're all children, we all go to school and we all have DNA." Some sensitive responses referred to the question, "What could you, Hiromasa and these Australian children could do together?"

"We could all draw pictures and then trade."

"They could teach us some games from their countries." My most favorite sensitive response was a made up game. The boy said, "We could play a game that included English, Japanese and Australian. Shinka. Say a word in your language and other kids say it in theirs."

Mean **overgeneralized** scores approached a significant difference between the two groups. All children overgeneralized some information, sometimes, with

international children overgeneralizing a little more frequently. It could be that overgeneralization is a normal part of cognitive development. Children learn information and assume that what they know can define the whole. Rather, that information defines a small part of all the information. What culture in the classroom can do is help children move beyond this stage to overcome the perpetuation of these ideas.

Very few culturally insensitive remarks were made by either group. No significant difference was discerned, but the numbers were very small. This could imply that culture learning of any kind helps children be more sensitive people. This is where I would have loved to have compared these two groups to a non-culturally oriented group.

Interestingly enough, ethnocentric responses was the only category where sex proved to approach significance. Boys were more likely to respond in ethnocentric ways than girls. I know of no substantiating research to support such an outcome. One boy stood out the most in this category. He mentioned continents rather than countries and thought that all people in North America all spoke the same language and everyone had white skin. He added, "No one in this country is poor." He also mentioned Europe. "They speak a different language and all have black skin." He had a great deal of information to offer me. He knew that Central America was between South America and North America, mentioned that Bangladesh was the poorest country in the world and that in many different countries there is "market day." He gathered from the picture of the children in Spain that "Their town is

pretty wrecked, but nice."

The difference in mean scores between sex could be due to the way in which we raise girls to be more empathetic and nurturing. But in my classroom that year, the girls could be far more judgmental and cutting with their words than the boys. Developmentally, children are beginning to realize that their words can hurt others just as much, or even more than the punch, swat or bite that seemed to work well for them at earlier ages. I am still not sure how to account for this significance.

A comparison of total responses between groups approached significance. The total number of responses given for the international group was a bit higher than those from the multicultural center.

Parent Influences. In the multicultural program, parent scores correlated with significance to children's overall culturally accurate score. From responses parents gave, this correlation seems to imply that a rich family heritage coupled with some cultural information from the classroom can influence children's culturally accurate information. There was no significance between children's sensitivity scores and parental input.

With regard to the international program, no correlation was found between responses on parent questionnaires and children's culturally accurate information, yet the correlation of parent reports and children's sensitivity scores was significant. These results support the fact that children's home environment coupled with an international curriculum can affect their attitudes toward people from other

countries.

DISCUSSION

Before this study could take shape, it was essential for me to get the kindergarten program operational. It was at this time that I began to reevaluate what had transpired in the Japan room. Over the five years in that classroom, the Japanese curriculum evolved. Each year new things were added and more information was gathered. I received a grant to travel to Japan and develop a sister school relationship with a lab school in Kyoto as well as to take in the culture. Two interns from Japan worked in my classroom for 6 month intervals over those years. I also benefitted from an extended three week visit in my classroom from a guest whom I had met while in Japan. I contacted the Japanese Consulate in Boston and made numerous trips to museums in the area to gather information about Japanese life and art forms. By my final year in the Japan room, approximately fifty percent of the curriculum centered around this unique and interesting culture.

Then I moved to our new kindergarten program to develop a program for kindergartners that reflected the Kenyan culture. I felt overwhelmed leaving an established culture curriculum which had become second nature to me and begin a venture into an uncharted territory. It was at this point that I needed to critically look at what exactly I wanted to communicate to my students and to determine how to approach a new part of the world. Many of the children who were ready to come to kindergarten had been with me in the Japan room. After settling ourselves into

what kindergarten meant and becoming comfortable with the basic routine, we talked as a group about how best to learn about Kenya. I read a basic book about Africa to the children. They found many aspects of this short narrative interesting. By the end of the book, the list of things we wanted to learn grew quite long. It was then that I realized I had not only taught children about Japan, I had taught them how to learn about another culture. As a group, they became aware of the things that might be different, like holidays, customs, language, geography, housing, clothing and animals. This quick session, in and of itself, helped me to understand that regardless of what I discovered in my research, I knew that at least as a group, I had achieved what I had set out to do: to help children to be inquisitive about, and open to, other places in the world that are different from our own surroundings.

On another occasion, while we were studying African animals, I read a book called "Elephant Crossing" by Toshi Yashida. Children became very excited. They realized that the author's name sounded Japanese. We looked in the back of the book and found that, in fact, the man was from Tokyo (which they remembered was the capital of Japan). They couldn't get over the coincidence that a Japanese man would be writing a book about African animals, two cultures that they had studied. This rich experience could not be replicated individually in a research situation. It took the experience of the group to construct not only the meaning but the enthusiasm in the group dynamic. The pure joy they took in the whole experience was breathtaking and confirmed to me that spending an extended period of time centered on one culture gave them a sense of ownership, pride and comfort in that

culture to which they could identify.

Many other experiences stand out in my mind that reaffirm the effects that international education has had on these children. One day, a little girl was working in her journal. She began by drawing a tree (a typical kindergarten topic). Suddenly, this tree no longer looked like an apple tree as it had when she began, but instead became a part of the Brazilian rainforest. She added many details that she had learned while in the Brazil classroom, nearly three years earlier. As she wrote the names of the animals in her picture using invented spelling, she told me that she wanted to share this masterpiece with her old teachers in the Brazil room.

"Maybe it will help those kids learn about the rainforest animals!" she said proudly.

The journal entry came at the perfect time. Many discussions with teachers in my school have centered around the amount of effort it takes to teach children about another country. Some express that it doesn't always seem worth the minimal outcome that they are able to detect. This was a perfect opportunity for me to show some of my colleagues that children are assimilating valuable information even though it might not be apparent at an early age. It was exciting for them to share this wonderful experience and to witness how deeply affected children can be from the early opportunities afforded them.

The children's interest in information about other countries extended beyond Kenya this year. Much interest was shown in the elections in South Africa. One child brought a newspaper article to school detailing this current event. "Look, they

are able to vote for the first time in Africa!" she said.

We had a lengthy discussion about the difference between Africa the continent and South Africa the country. We located South Africa and Kenya on the map and moved on to elaborate upon the current events described in the article. The children drew parallels between Nelson Mandela and his efforts in South Africa and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States during the 1960s. Their perception was astounding. When interviews for this research were conducted months after this exciting election, three children mentioned South Africa as another country that they knew about and mentioned Nelson Mandela and the struggle for equal rights the black people in this country were working towards.

As a culminating theme at the end of the school year, the class wrote a newspaper. Four children wrote stories in the "world news" section about the four tribes we learned about in January, African animals we had studied, and the events in South Africa. The final article was a review of a play about an African boy and girl and their cheetah that a number of children wrote and performed. The information presented to them this year was important to them. That, in itself, was indicative of the impact international education has had on this group of children.

I am a proponent of international education, for I believe that exposing children to one culture for an extended period of time enables them to retain more culturally accurate information about that country and be more sensitive as they approach others in our world. This research study has confirmed these findings to be true in this small population. However, each teacher must find for him or

herself, what approach would fit best.

Once a culturally oriented curriculum has been integrated, informal research should be accomplished. Anecdotal records could be accumulated throughout the year. Another alternative might be to ask children a short list of questions at different points in the school year to glean any changes in information and/or attitudes. It is also essential to investigate the differentiation between information of the group as a whole and the individuals that make up that group. For the collaboration that transpires within that group offers us much information about the growth and development of the attitudes each child acquires about people of difference.

There has been research accomplished by a classroom teacher on the effects of her own curriculum. There is research by an outside observer on the effects of one curriculum in a single classroom. There is research on a single approach used in a number of different settings. Now, we must integrate these approaches to research in the classroom and make it happen in this cultural venue.

CONCLUSION

Over the past ten years, society has become more aware of that which links us all as a global community. Environmental issues are at the forefront of concern for our government as well as others around the world. The message being sent is that we must work together cooperatively before our natural resources are extinguished. We must learn to collaborate before that can happen.

There is no doubt that children are our future. The key to the kind of future we envision lies in helping the next generations respect and embrace diversity rather than fear and reject those differences. By moving forward in the practice of exposing children to culture learning in the classroom and being confident that our methods are worthy as well as effective, we can impact the future and hope it will become a brighter, more peaceful one.

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